



BRITISHROWING

Honorary Rowing Safety Adviser Monthly Report

January 2025

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TEAMWORK | OPEN TO ALL | COMMITMENT

Incidents in January

Take care letting people into your launch

I normally take care to remove gender references but, in this case, doing so would obscure the potential significance of the incident. I have included detail that I would not normally include as this is needed for a full understanding.

A young, adult, female coach was alone in a launch during an early morning session. Someone was heard from the bank shouting for help. When she approached, a man said that his boat had unmoored and was floating in the river. He asked her name, and he told her that his name was James. The coach could not hear or see a boat anywhere. The man asked the coach to go and get on the boat; she said no. He asked to get on the launch to go and look for it and he did get onto the launch. When she shone a light, she saw that he was wearing odd shoes, a hospital tag bracelet and a PPE mask around his chin. He asked if the rowers are children; she said no they are adult women. He asked if any of them are single and said, 'I'm not loaded, but I'm not boring'.

He then asked her to drive around and see where his boat is, asking her to drive into divots and side passages along the river; she says no. By then she felt very unsafe and uneasy. He kept asking her if she felt safe and she said no.

He kept asking for her phone; she said no. He appeared frantic and skittish, swearing and getting frustrated. He asked her how much she knows about the river. He told her that the name of his boat is 'Made in Chelsea'. She cannot see or hear his boat anywhere. She tried to stay near houses so that she could call for help if needed. The 8+ stayed close by but there were no other launches on the river. The man then asked her to drive away from the 8+ to go and look for the boat; she said no. Suddenly he announced that he could see his boat and that she must help him get on the boat. She dropped him off at the sailing club and he began to climb over the fence to try and get to his boat. She then drove away as she still felt shaken and unsafe.

She returned to the club, called 999, and spoke to the Police as she was concerned about the man. The Police came to investigate and took a statement from the coach. They showed her a photo of a man and asked if it was him; she said yes. The man was known to them.

Please beware of strangers. Please take extra care not to approach anyone on the bank who you do not know and do not put your launch in a position where they can get aboard.

Take care of rowers having seizures

A young adult adaptive rower was performing the bent over row exercise. They were aware that they were about to have a seizure and fell to the floor.

The coach removed obstacles, such as a dumbbell, so that they were out of the way and cushioned the rower's head on their legs. The coach spoke to the rower throughout the seizure until the rower regained consciousness about two minutes later. The rower's father remained with him. The rower recovered slowly and after a further ten minutes, was able to move onto a seat. The coach supported the rower in this position and the rower was given some water to drink.

The other athletes did not appear to be aware of the incident and carried on with their training.

I think that the incident was well handled by people who knew what they were doing.

Take care with the area outside your boathouse

An arsonist attempted to set fire to several objects in the area around the rowing club, at night. A car was burnt out in a neighbouring street. Nearby CCTV showed the individual attempting to light objects in the street and then attempting to ignite litter underneath the front of the rowing club's Portakabin. Fortunately, the items wouldn't light so the individual made their way along to the boatyard entrance where they set fire to the fencing, plastic oil drums, Calor gas cage and polystyrene pontoon floats.

The flames were spotted by a local resident and the fire brigade attended within ten minutes. The fire burnt through the power supply to the clubhouse and the club was without power for ten days.

The incident was reported to the police. The club repaired the boatyard fencing, and an electrician has replaced the power supply. Gas bottles and other flammable items have been relocated away from the roadside fencing.

Please consider this hazard at your boathouse and take care to protect any flammable materials.

Take care of young rowers when it is cold

There was an incident where the crew of a J13 4x+ suffered mild hypothermia due to cold and wet weather conditions during a water training session. The crew had only been rowing for about ten to twenty minutes when the coach was informed by both the rowers and the cox that there was a problem. The experienced junior cox stopped the boat in a safe place out of the wind and reported that a member of the crew was feeling very unwell due to the cold weather conditions and that boat needed to urgently return to boathouse pontoon as soon as possible. Then another rower reported feeling very cold and unable to feel their hands. The coach noticed that the other crew members were also shivering with the cold and their clothes were wet. It was clear the whole crew were showing signs of mild hypothermia (shivering, pale and cold) and they were in a distressed state from being very cold and wet through. The crew rowed the boat back to the boathouse to re-warm in the rowing club facilities.

The crew was helped to get out of the cold into a warm, safe environment. They were able to change out of their wet clothes and they were given dry, clean clothes to wear. Also, they were given Space blankets and given a hot chocolate drink. The coach stayed with the juniors to monitor their well-being and their recovery. The whole junior squad was advised to ensure that they bring an extra change of rowing kit and shoes and to wear appropriate clothing such as splash jackets, hats, gloves and wear layers to suit the weather conditions.

In another incident the rower at bow in a beginner junior 4x became very wet due to back splashing from the inexperienced crew. The rower became very cold and was shivering. They were taken ashore, wrapped in warm clothes, given a hot drink, and looked after by the Club Welfare Officer.

Please take extra care of your young rowers when it is cold. There is more information in an item below on "Rowing in Cold Weather". Please also remember that sugary drinks provide the calories to fuel shivering and aid rewarming.

Take care to report violence to the Police

An experienced senior 8+ was rowing under a bridge when a group of four children began to throw chunks of ice and snow over the side, aiming at and hitting the boat and rowers. The size of the chunks of ice ranged in size from that of a fist, to that of a football. The ice hit the boat and two of the rowers. Fortunately, the rowers were hit with smaller pieces and suffered minor bruising. There was no significant damage to the boat.

This incident has been reported to the Police and information has been shared with neighbouring clubs.

Take care when towing a trailer

Members of a junior crew were struck by a trailer being driven away as they were loading their boat onto their trailer. Some of the rowers sustained injuries and there was some boat damage. The members of the crew were assessed by First Aiders and two rowers were required to attend A&E with the Head of Rowing, and one is off sport until concussion has healed.

The response from the club involved was that *“both mirrors were checked as the driver attempted to pull away, but the athletes and boat were not visible and in a blind spot”*.

My response was that this demonstrates the need to have a "banksman" i.e. a person on foot who can supervise the vehicle movements and assist the driver. It is not sufficient just to check in the mirrors. The fact that there was a "blind spot" shows that it was not safe to move the vehicle without assistance.

Vehicles should always give way to pedestrians, particularly children. This is specified in rule 204 of the new Highway Code available here <https://www.highwaycodeuk.co.uk/>.

Rule 204 states *"The road users most at risk from road traffic are pedestrians, in particular children, older adults and disabled people, cyclists, horse riders and motorcyclists. It is particularly important to be aware of children, older adults and disabled people, and learner and inexperienced drivers and riders. In any interaction between road users, those who can cause the greatest harm have the greatest responsibility to reduce the danger or threat they pose to others."*

Take care on the bike

A spotter on a bike on the towpath was too focused on the crew rather on the path ahead and cycled off the towpath and into the river. The spotter was rescued by people nearby but suffered some bruising.

In another incident the handlebar of a coach's bike snagged on brambles when they were steering to avoid an oncoming group of pedestrians. This resulted in them deviating off the towpath into the river while trying to regain control.

Please encourage people to take care, whatever they are doing.

Take extra care when overtaking

There was a collision between an 8+ and a 2x travelling in opposite directions. The 2x was positioned correctly but the 8+ had moved out to overtake another boat.

Take care with people who suffer from Migraine

There was an incident where a rower in a 4x started to experience symptoms of migraine towards the end of the outing. The crew was on its way back to the boathouse. The rower was able to gently row with the crew. However, their symptoms were worsening as they returned to the club.

Members of the crew helped the rower to return to the clubhouse. Symptoms involved pain, limited vision and vomiting. The crew members offered to call an ambulance, however, the rower requested that their partner come and take them home. The rower was supported by the crew members- lying down in a darkened room. An ice pack was used to cool their head. The rower's partner arrived within 15 minutes, and they returned home. The partner of the rower was advised to contact 111 should they have further concerns.

Please encourage rowers who are prone to migraine to please discuss this with their coach or club so that a contingency plan can be agreed.

Take care in the Gym

The bar that a rower was using in the gym contacted a rowing machine that was standing on its end. This caused the slide on the rowing machine to dislodge at the middle and fall onto the rower hitting the back of their shoulder but missing their head.

Please avoid standing rowing machines on their ends and if you have to do so then please keep the area around them clear.

Take care to check your own boats

An Umpire at a competition submitted six reports on boat failures detected at Control Commission checks. All of these were failures of heel restraints.

These demonstrate failures of the clubs to ensure that their boats comply with basic safety conditions. They also indicate that boat checking is not routine at these clubs. Please train all your rowers to check their boats and to do so prior to all outings, not just those at competitions.

Take care with your launch

A launch kill cord was pulled but engine did not stop, this is thought to have been caused by cold and ice. Please ensure that yours are checked at the start of each outing

In another incident on a tidal river, a coach pushed his launch off without looking downstream and nearly put his engine through the bow of a 4- and then drove close to boats when producing excessive wash.

Take care at low water and when the water is shallow

A stable 4x+ suffered rudder failure and ran aground on a mud bank in darkness with a full moon and the tide continued to go out. Two safety launches attempted a recovery, but the conditions made the attempt impossible. The emergency services were called, and the boat and crew were recovered.

In another, a boat broke a fin when it hit an object in shallow water.

In another incident, an 8+ was blown by a crosswind into shallows scraping the bow section of the hull.

In yet another incident, an 8+ ran aground in a tidal river when returning to the shore after their race.

Take care of your boat lights

A collision occurred when an 8+ was positioned across a river, blocking the river and did not have a visible bow light on their boat. After the collision the bowman revealed a barely visible light that was attached to his head under his hat.

Another Incident Report concerned two occasions when a Pilot Gig was rowing with no lights on an inland river.

Please ensure that boats afloat at night display the correct lights.

Take care to close the gate

In one incident a 4+ suffered a partial capsized (a rower and the cox entered the water) when a gate opened, and an oar was released.

In another incident a 4x+ capsized when a gate came open during an outing.

In a further incident, a blade popped out of the gate and caused a pair to capsize, the pair were in the water for some time struggling to get back in boat. They were guided back in by an 8+ also on the water acting as their buddy boat.

Please see the Safety Alert, Close the Gate here [SafetyAlert20143CloseTheGate.pdf](#), and please ensure that boats are checked before going afloat.

Check your wing riggers



Two riggers failed during an outing in a 4-.

In another incident at a different club a rigger on a 4x cracked in what appears to be the heat affected zone of a weld.

If you club has riggers like these then please take care to check them frequently.



Take care in strong streams

A 4+ was turning in the river and the bow became wedged in a tree branch that was under the water and a tree that was hanging down with driftwood in it. The pressure of the strong stream caused the bow to break and the 4+ started to take on water. The crew were rescued with the safety launch. The launch returned for the boat.



Coaching and Launch Driving when Pregnant

There was a request for advice on the risks to someone coaching from a launch when pregnant. The following advice was provided.

The government and Health and Safety Executive has specific regulations relating to pregnant women and the workplace here <https://www.gov.uk/working-when-pregnant-your-rights> and here <https://www.hse.gov.uk/mothers/employer/workplace-safety-law.htm>.

There is guidance on ROWING and Pregnancy from the British Rowing Medical Panel on the website here [Rowing and Pregnancy - British Rowing](#). Launch driving is less of an issue for someone who is pregnant than rowing may be. Your coach should be guided by her Medical Advisers as they know her and can provide advice that would be specific to her. They will also know whether there were problems in any previous pregnancies.

Integrity of hatch fittings

There were some issues with the buoyancy of Celtic Longboats. I suggested that the club should check whether sealant has been used when fitting the outer ring of the hatch cover assembly to the boat. If it was not, then I suggested that the outer ring be refitted using sealant.

This advice is valid for all hatch covers. If the outer ring is not sealed to the boat, then the hatch may leak.

Rowing in cold weather

There was an enquiry about sculling in cold weather as there was concern that a club was doing more single sculling where there is an increased risk of capsize. At this time of the year this comes with cold water shock risk. What advice do you offer to keep rowers safe? Obviously, we assess conditions and competence of the rowers before going afloat and have ribs in attendance for juniors and novices, but accidents can still happen. Do some clubs require rowers to wear buoyancy aids?

The response was that I really do not think that you will have much joy requiring experienced scullers to row in buoyancy aids. Auto inflation life jackets will not help much either as by the time they have inflated then the wearer's head will have already been under water and the damage may have been done due to the gasp reflex. The trick is to inflate the life jackets before entering the water.

Bigger boats (2xs rather than 1xs) would be a good option especially if you introduce the concept of coaching less experienced rowers. I have not heard of clubs requiring rowers to wear buoyancy aids.

There was also a request for definitive advice on rowing when the temperature is low. Is there a cut off low temperature below which senior crews in small boats should not go out. Captains were suggesting that senior crews can go out in air temperatures of 0 degrees and above with either a rescue buddy or a launch on the water.

The response was it does not make sense to think about one parameter only (e.g. air temperature) as there are other parameters that are at least as relevant. Dry cold air may not be a problem, but wet cold air combined with wind may be a greater hazard. Surface water temperature can be higher (or lower) than that of the water beneath, so it is probably better to measure both if you want a water temperature measurement. I suggested a more holistic approach and not base the decision on any one factor.

However, if there is any ice on the water then do not go afloat.

The other advice is to dress appropriately, particularly the cox, use stable boats (8, 4, etc. or boats with floats), keep outings short and intense (no sitting around chatting) and get off the water and into the boathouse quickly. Whatever happens, don't let people who have been sweating get cold. Everyone should stay hydrated.

When thinking about clothing, remember the mnemonic COLD: -

- Clean
- Open
- Layered and
- Dry

It is also important to know how to recognise hypothermia and know how to treat it, there is training material on the British Rowing website here [Course: Cold Water & Hypothermia | Home](#).

Please also consider travel risks in very cold weather. The risks associated with travel, particularly to remote locations, can be greater than the risks associated with the activities at those locations.

Cardiac issues

There was an incident where a rower became ill after an outing and collapsed while putting their boat away. It was thought to be due to a heart attack. A passing member of the public helped, and a passing crew with an off-duty paramedic stopped and immediately aided the casualty. A crew member called for an ambulance to gain access to the defibrillator, which is located on the wall outside the club, but this was not recognised as being registered with the ambulance service. The off-duty paramedic took over the call whilst another continued chest compressions, and a different defibrillator was used. The ambulance arrived within minutes and took over and the defibrillator was no longer needed. Access to the original defibrillator would have resulted in it being available about five minutes earlier.

The rower was taken to hospital in an air ambulance after being treated by two ambulance crews and an emergency paramedic. He was able to be stabilised and had a pulse and was breathing independently.

Members of the crew were taken care of and kept warm with extra clothes and tea.

It was subsequently reported that the rower is doing well after having a stent fitted.

If you have a defibrillator then please ensure that it is registered with the Circuit here, <https://thecircuit.uk/>. This website contains the following information: -

"The Circuit – the national defibrillator network, provides the NHS ambulance services with vital information about defibrillators across the UK so that in those crucial moments after a cardiac arrest, they can be accessed quickly to help save lives."

Registration is free and easy.

If you have a defibrillator locked on the outside of your club, then please display the access code on a notice inside the club on a notice board or a phone number to phone to access the code.

There is a Safety Alert on AEDs here <https://www.britishrowing.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Safety-Alert-Automated-External-Defibrillators-1.pdf>. This links to a Safety Alert on CPR.

The Chair of the British Rowing Medical Advisory Panel provided the following advice: -

For AEDs

- register your AED(s)
- share the locations and access codes between local clubs

For ALL suspected cardiac events and for resuscitation

- call for help (999 Ambulance) immediately (they will provide advice and send an ambulance)
- If an AED is available, get the AED to the casualty and apply the pads ASAP.
- the AED will diagnose the issue and tell the responders what to do

I am also advised that not all cardiac arrests are ventricular fibrillation (VF) (treated with an electric shock)

- 17% are ventricular fibrillation (VF),
- 52% are pulseless electrical activity (PEA) (there is electrical activity but no heartbeat, no cardiac output and no pulse) and
- 20% are asystole (a flat line electrical trace).

A defibrillator is only used to deliver a shock in VF, but a defibrillator should be brought to ALL cardiac arrests – the defibrillator will determine whether an electric shock is needed or whether to deliver chest compressions. The difference between VF, PEA and Asystole cannot be determined by looking at or examining the casualty.

You do not need to know what is going on inside the casualty's chest. Just fit the pads and do what the AED tells you to do. CPR is important because it tends to maintain the blood circulation and helps to protect the brain. Keep delivering CPR, in relays, if possible, until the casualty recovers and starts to breathe for themselves (Return of Spontaneous Circulation) or until someone tells you that you can stop.

Avoidance of Collisions at Sea

I was asked “What regulations cover collision rules at sea for rowing vessels?”

The response was that the Convention on the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea, 1972 (COLREGs) apply to all vessels at sea, including rowing boats. There is more information on the International Maritime Organisation website here [Convention on the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea, 1972 \(COLREGs\)](#)

The only specific reference to "vessels under oars" is in relation to lights. This is in rule 25 (d) (ii) (as explained elsewhere in this report).

The COLREGs are published in the UK by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency as a Merchant Shipping Notice (MSN 1781 (M+ F) and form the Merchant Shipping (Distress Signals and Prevention of Collisions) Regulations 1996, This is a Notice to Owners, Masters, Skippers, Officers and Crews of Merchant Ships, Fishing Vessels, Pleasure Vessels, Yachts and Other Seagoing Craft. They are available here [MSN 1781 \(M+F\)](#).

I was then asked that which category rowing boats fit into as this is crucial for collision avoidance and was told that convention amongst harbour masters is that rowing boats are powered vessels that must give way to sail, but the regulations do not specifically cover this.

The response was that this is covered by the definition in COLREGs Rule 3(b) “*The term “power-driven vessel” means any vessel propelled by machinery*”. Oars in boats can be thought of as levers and levers are machines.

The other way to think about this is to consider manoeuvrability. Rowing boats can steer in any direction including directly into the wind. They can also change direction quite quickly.

Rowing boats should be considered to be vessels under power. That is what sailors will do.

(As an aside, it could be argued that coxless boats are vessels under power but not under command providing they display two black balls forward one above the other in daylight!)

Safety of non-swimmers

There was a request for advice from a Watersports club in Australia. They have several non-swimmers or not confident swimmers. They require everyone to always wear a personal floatation device (PFD) when afloat. They are also going to start a class for new people to come and get introduced to their PFD and do a float test. They asked whether there is anything else they should be considering for the non-swimmers.

The response was that the key thing about anyone entering the water unexpectedly is that they do not panic. They have to learn to trust the PFD. If the water is warm and not rough, then there should not be a problem. If it is cold, then they should be aware of the "gasp reflex" and breath in before their head goes under water. If there is spray, then they should protect their face and keep facing away from the spray. This is not easy as the waves will tend to turn them to face the spray. If this is an issue, then you could use spray hoods, but I doubt that non-swimmers will be taken into rough water.

Some older people cannot swim as well as they used to be able to when they were younger and may not realise this. It is worth giving everyone a chance to practise swimming even if they think they can do it. Some may be surprised.

The safety of reverse wing riggers in processional races

I was asked about the safety of reverse wing riggers in bumps races, but much of this would apply during all processional races.

The response was that with all boats going in the same direction the closing velocities are not likely to be as high as in a head on collision.

If a boat with reverse wing riggers collides with a boat in front of it, travelling in the same direction, then the riggers will tend to push the other rowers away and the impact may not be too serious.

If the boat with reverse wing riggers is impacted from astern, then the end of its riggers may impact on the crew of the boat behind and cause injury. If both boats are moving, then the closing speed may not be too great. If the boat with reverse wing riggers is stationary and has not cleared the course, and is hit from astern, then there could be a hazardous impact. There may not be a high probability of this.

If this is still a concern, then insist that the boats with reverse wing riggers fit forestays to the riggers on each side closest to their stern.

Recovering a rower from the water into a launch

Following an incident, there was some discussion about recovering a rower into a launch. There are many ways to use a launch to assist a person in the water. One option is to carry a boarding ladder in the launch so as to help the casualty to climb into the launch from the water. They are available in a variety of sizes, are relatively inexpensive and look something like this: -



Readily available training materials

I was asked for readily available rowing safety training materials suitable for University students. I suggested the following training: -

- Safety Basics
- Advanced Risk Assessment and
- Capsize Drill for Coaches

They are all available here [All courses | Home](#). It would also help to do the Cold Water training (this is in the same place).

Access to training materials by non-members

I was asked how non-members of British Rowing could gain access to the Rowing Safety training materials. The following advice was provided by a member of the Membership Team: -

Access to the safety courses for anyone wanting to row was actioned a while back. And non-members can access the safety online information and undertake the courses which are available on RowHow.

All anyone needs to do is follow the 4 quick steps.

Step 1: Sign up to create a free user profile on the British Rowing website [here](#) if they don't already have one.

Step 2: Check their email to validate the email address.

Step 3: Follow this [link](#) and log into our online learning platform RowHow using the same details they created for the profile. If they already have a membership/ user profile, simply sign in using these login details.

Step 4: Search and click on online learning to be directed to online safety courses available. And then click enrol to get started.